

[Hank's Specials]

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FORM C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

[Tall Tales?]

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

No. Words

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May 26 [1939?]

State Illinois

NAME OF WORKER J. D. Stradling

ADDRESS 553 South State Street

DATE April 19, 1939

SUBJECT Hank's Specials

NAME OF INFORMANT - John Colnon

HANK'S SPECIALS

(The character of 'Hank' is vague. The idea might have begun with some real individual. He was evidently a wizard at mixing drinks, with peculiar effects. He was sometimes called Joe, Mac, August etc. The central idea is the same in each, so it may be just a collection of whoppers that were told about the same individual as in Paul Bunyan and Casey Jones)

As a bartender, Hank was much more of an artist. The usual Tom Collins, dry Martinis and such stuff were child's play. Likewise the Mickey Finn. His specialty was sizing up a customer and prescribing the proper drink. His specials were good for any ailment. When a customer came in with the blues, the gout or the pip, Hank would study him a minute and then turn to the back bar. Nobody knew just what he did and he never told what went into his concoctions because all the other bartenders were jealous. His specials were things that nobody but Hank could make.

He'd run his eye over the bottles on the back bar, take a little of this and a little of that, hold it up to the light, sniff it, taste it, and then add a little something else.

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And whatever it was it was always right. Hank got to curing so many human ills that he got the doctors down on him and they threatened to have him pinched for practicing medicine without a license. So Hank, being a good union man, gave up curing people's ills and turned to other fields.

Hank got to be pretty popular with his fancy drinks. He worked all over the country for somebody was always jealous of his popularity and luring him away to a better job. He knew some of the best people.

There was a little wop used to come to a place where Hank worked in New York. The wop was always broke and downhearted. One night he said to Hank: "Joes, if I could only sing. Maka lotsa dough in da opera." So Hank thought it over and turned to the back

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bar. He mixed something slowly and carefully and pushed it over the bar like it was holy communion. "Here, try this," he said. Maybe you remember Caruso. He was one of Hank's best friends.

Hank was out West one time. Somebody had been selling booze and guns to the Sioux. There was a young lad by the name of William Hickok in the saloon when the Indians hit town loaded with booze. After a couple of Hank's specials, young Bill was seeing double, so he shot two redskins with each bullet and had a couple left over. That was how Wild Bill got his start.

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Sometimes Hank's specials were not so lucky. Joe, a baldheaded man, had been having trouble with his wife. He was feeling pretty low. "Here, try this. It'll grow hair on your chest," said Hank. It gave Joe a sudden idea. "By golly," he said, "I've tried everything else on my head, I might as well try this, too." So he took a bottle home. His wife saw him fixing to put booze on his head and knew he had been drinking again, so she beat him up and threw the bottle out the window into a crick that ran behind the house. Come Saturday, Joe went down to the crick to take a bath. Hair sprouted all over him so fast that he was shot by mistake for a grizzly before he could reach his clothes.

One night Hank was mixing up something for experiment. A few drops fell on the floor. There was a mouse running around under the bar. Suddenly the mouse reared up on its hind legs, roared like a lion, and chased Hank and the bouncers right out of the place.

Not long after, a pale little man with a worried look asked Hank for a pick-me-up. Hank looked at the customer and remembered the mouse. He ran his eye over the array of bottles trying to remember what he had used. He took a little of this and a little of that with the air of an artist and the care of a drug clerk. "Try this," he said.

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But Hank never made that again. The little man coughed, whooped, turned a back somersault off the stool and got up fighting mad. "Where's that cop?" he yelled and went out looking for the man on the beat. Soon the riot squad was out and when he finished up with them, the customer looked around, brushed his hands, and said: "Now where can I find them damn Marines?"

Hank saw he might be accessory to murder so he went to work in the opposite direction. A husky longshoreman came in looking for trouble. He was too big and tough for three bartenders so the boss said to slip him a Mickey. Buy Hank slipped him his new special. The tough egg was mighty surprised to find wings sprouting out on his shoulders. He broke out in a hymn and went out looking for a soap box to start preaching. Hank thought it was a good idea and mixed his special for a lot more. But it got the preachers down on him. There were revival meetings on every corner. The preachers threatened to close the saloon if Hank did any more so the boss told Hank to lay off.

Lots of times Hank's specials were too good. There was the young lady who tipped off Hank in advance that her sweetheart didn't love her any more. Hank studied hard on the problem and when she brought her fiance in, Hank was all ready for him. But it didn't work out right. She was nearly raped 5 right there in the saloon and the last they saw of her, she was heading down the street as fast as she could go, screaming bloody murder, with the boy friend two jumps behind with fire in his eye.

Mose, the old darky who was swamper in the saloon, was known as a good man among the colored folks. He always had wenches dropping around to walk home with him after hours. Old Mose was ailing and Hank thought he looked worn and peaked. Hank asked Mose if he would like to have one of those specials. But old Mose just shook his head sadly and said: "No suh, boss. If ah got mah druthers, ah'd rather not."

A couple of firemen got to arguing one night over which was best at the job. One fired for the Rock Island and the other for the Q. There were some other trainmen in the saloon

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and they took up the argument. It began to spread so far that finally the two roads agreed on a race. They decided on Chicago to Kansas City with tracks cleared all the way.

Just before the race, young Newt, who fired for the Q. dropped in for one of Hank's specials. He was feeling pretty low because betting was seven to five and he was on the five end. Hank thought for a few minutes and then mixed up something that cheered Newt so much he decided to take along a bottle.

The race got under way and Newt was soon feeling so good he had even the drivers red hot. When he finished the last of the bottle, he carelessly threw it into the firebox. The engine let out one shriek of the whistle and all Newt could do was grab hold of a stanchion and hang on.

The Rock Island was due in K.C. at 8:30 and rolled in at 7:45. There was no sign of the Q. Pretty soon they got a wire from Newt asking what time the R.I. got in. The dispatcher wired back: "R.I. in forty five minutes ahead of schedule. Where are you broke down?" But Newt wired back: "Broke down, Hell. We just got her stopped in Colorado."

Hank was very sad when Prohibition came along for he couldn't do very much with white mule and bathtub gin. Folks had lost all appreciation of real art. They were drinking their dynamite raw and thinking it quite an accomplishment. Those were the days when a customer would down a green jolt turn a couple of somersaults, get up, push his eyes back in his head, and say: "Gosh, that was good!"

But Hank never gave up and kept on experimenting. One day he was mixing up something from bootleg hootch. He got up the courage to try it himself. Everything was all right for a minute and then something went Wham. Hank was never seen again. Seems the ingredients of that one were all right while they were iced but when they got warmed up inside Hank they exploded.

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A lot of saloons and speakeasies claimed that Hank had worked for them. Once he was gone, they all tried to cash in on his popularity. But the meanest of all was a speakeasy in St. Louis 7 that had a large brown spot on the ceiling. Whenever anyone would say: "I wonder what became of Hank?" they'd point to the ceiling and say: "See that big grease spot up there with arms and legs like a man? Well, that's Hank."

FORM D

Extra Comment

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER J. D. Stradling

ADDRESS 553 South State Street

DATE April 19, 1939

SUBJECT Hank's Specials

NAME OF INFORMANT John Colnon

The title 'Hank's Specials' is my own because I knew of no other. It seems this was a sort of legend growing up to the time of Prohibition but not now current. One episode was added during Prohibition to show what became of Hank but there seems to be nothing nowadays. My informant says there are more incidents that he can't remember. The various episodes are told under a number of different names but it seems to be all one

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story, told in various ways, in different places. Informant says it was gotten together as a connected story in one of the newspapers about twenty five years ago and he is trying to remember. Might be possible to find some more of it.